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Interview with Dr. Peter Goelitz

Editor-in-chief of *Angewandte Chemie*

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"Peter Gölitz studied chemistry at the University of Göttingen, where he earned a doctorate in 1978 on a scholarship funded by the Chemical Industry Fund. He undertook postdoctoral studies at IBM in San José (California) and at the University of Hamburg.

Dr. Gölitz looks back on a longstanding, successful career at Verlag Chemie (later VCH-Verlagsgesellschaft, and currently Wiley-VCH), where he serves as Editor-in-Chief of the acclaimed journal Angewandte Chemie. After two years as an editor, he was appointed Editor-in-Chief in 1982. In this capacity, he founded a number of chemical journals, which soon established themselves under his leadership. Close cooperation with the representatives of numerous scientific bodies and associations, which often own a stake in the journals, and with outstanding scientists like the Nobel Laureates Jean-Marie Lehn and Ryoji Noyori, played a crucial role in this respect.

Dr. Gölitz has turned Angewandte Chemie from a chiefly German journal into one of the foremost professional journals in the field of chemistry; ninety percent of its contributions are made by scientists based outside Germany. Most of the articles published in the journal come from the United States, Germany, Japan, and China. Under Dr. Gölitz, the journal's contents have also undergone considerable development: today, Angewandte Chemie covers the entire field of chemistry, with contributions reaching well into physics, the material sciences, and the life sciences. Ever new rubrics serve to strengthen ties with contributors and readers alike.

He also serves as an adviser to the German Chemical Society (GDCh) and is a member of various professional bodies and committees. He has received numerous awards in recognition of his services to chemistry."[1]

1. How has been your journey so far as a chemist?

I studied chemistry at the University of Göttingen in Germany (1970-75) where I also got my PhD (1978) under the supervision of Prof. Armin de Meijere. The topic of my thesis was in physical organic chemistry: I studied reactive intermediates such as carbocations, radicals, and very strained molecules; in addition I developed a method for the trifluoromethylation of a variety of compounds, and this lead to my first publication in *Angewandte Chemie* in 1978.

In 1978/79 I was a postdoctoral fellow with Dr. Robert D. Miller at the IBM Research Laboratories in San Jose, California. There I worked on the photochemistry of cyclobutanone and the synthesis of certain gamma lactames. After a short stint as a research fellow in Prof. de Meijere's group, which had by then moved to Hamburg, I joined *Angewandte Chemie* as a Desk Editor in October 1980. On Nov. 1, 1982, the publishers and the German Chemical Society (GDCh) nominated me to become the Editor-in-chief of *Angewandte Chemie*, a position I still hold today. This job provides me with the opportunity to stay up to date in chemistry and it also offered many challenges at the technical end of producing a world-class journal: scientific publishing has moved over the years of my career from a solely print-based business, even without e-mail, to a fully online operation.

The developments in chemistry inspired me to help with the start of new journals, and indeed I am the Founding Editor of ca. 10 journals, from *Advanced Materials* to *Small*, from *Chemistry - A European Journal* to *Chemistry – An Asian Journal*, and from *ChemBioChem* and *ChemPhysChem* to *ChemCatChem*.

To work as an Editor implies life-long learning, as every manuscript brings new chemistry with it; as the Editor-in-chief of *Angewandte Chemie* I had to quickly broaden my horizon in chemistry from being a physical-organic chemist to "chemist, general" and scout new heads.

2. You've visited several institutions in different countries so far. What is your impression of the future of chemistry in India?

With its huge population and large number of academic institutions, India will have a bright future in chemistry. Many of the current generation of Indian chemistry professors have spent some time abroad, in particular at top institutions in North America and Europe, and it is their call to educate the next generation and to inspire the current students to tackle the many problems to be solved by chemists, ranging from fundamental studies to contributions in energy research and health science. In the most recent three to four years *Angewandte Chemie* has seen a significant increase in the number of submissions from India (241 Communicatoins were submitted in 2010, and this number rose to 37 1in 2013); before 2010 this number had been more or less flat for a long period. I take this as an indication that much more will come from India in

the future – contributions to our science in general and manuscripts to *Angewandte Chemie* and its sister journals like *Chemistry – An Asian Journal* and the *Asian Journal of Organic Chemistry* in particular.

3. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you see a manuscript from India?

Wherever a manuscript is coming from I first browse to find out whether it brings something genuinely new or whether it is a "me too" paper that does not convey new knowledge – and this first look is independent of the country-of-origin of a new manuscript. In the past though, I must say, there were more me too papers from India then for example from the USA, but this is currently changing.

4. What are your views about the publication from the Asian countries, especially from China and India? How do you see both these countries contributing towards the future of chemistry?

Both China and India will contribute enormously to the future of chemistry. The number of talents in the two countries, the current investment, and the eagerness of the scientists to contribute all bode well for this. China is currently ahead of India but your country could quickly follow. It is important that excellent scientists can give guidance to the system and not only science bureaucrats. A recent Editorial from Prof. Adam Heller from the University of Texas at Austin points in the direction what should be done or what can go wrong: Not All Research Is Equal, *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2014**, *53*, 2782-2783. In this context two contributions from Prof. Gautam Desiraju, a member of *Angewandte Chemie*'s International Advisory Board, are also of interest:

1. Science in a Changing World (Editorial), *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2011**, *50*, 5590–5591, Prof. Gautam R. Desiraju
2. Chemistry in India: Unlocking the Potential (Essay), *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2013**, *52*, 114–117, Prof. Elangannan Arunan, Dr. Ramasamy Brakaspathy, Prof. Gautam R. Desiraju and Dr. Swaminathan Sivaram

In this context I would also like to mention that because of the rise of Asian chemists through the last two decades Wiley-VCH, together with chemical societies in Asia – and the Chemical Research Society of India (CRSI) played a major role – started *Chemistry – An Asian Journal* and the *Asian Journal of Organic Chemistry*; the Asian chemical societies work together under the umbrella of the Asian Chemical Editorial Society (ACES).

5. We would like to ask you where we are lacking behind in research publications and how can we improve it?

I already touched upon this above: less "me too research". While it is easier and perhaps even more rewarding in terms of short-term citations etc. if you work in a mainstream field, it is quite difficult there to contribute a truly original work, a breakthrough development. The improvement in research publications has to start with an improvement in research: select the right topic and be risky, everything else will follow. Indian scientists have the advantage over China's and other Asian and many European scientists that English is more or less their mother language.

6. Any advice to young researchers who might be writing manuscripts for the *Angewandte Chemie* journal?

First of all, please work hard on the title: it should be informative as we live in the age of online searches, and a title has to be "discoverable". Furthermore, it must not be "totally dry", it should trigger the interest of potential readers. And finally, don't oversell, the article has to deliver what the title promises. Because of the "discoverability" the Abstract of a manuscript is also very important, and this should be rather super dry than entertaining. Beyond that: Don't be verbose, use well-crafted graphical material. Cite all relevant literature but avoid citations just to demonstrate that you know everybody in the field. My colleague Dr. Richard Threlfall, Managing Editor of the *Asian Journal of Organic Chemistry*, recently wrote about these and many more writing tips for scientists at http://www.chemistryviews.org/details/education/5202161/Tips_for_Writing_Better_Science_Papers.html. Please note that these Writing Tips are published on ChemistryViews, a most attractive general chemical portal; and there is a webinar with Q&A.

7. What are the upcoming trends in the area of chemistry? How do you see biology contributing to *Angewandte Chemie* presently and in the future?

The supply of clean energy and the improvement of human living conditions are constantly providing new research frontiers for chemists. Electrochemistry, for example, a rather old and unfashionable subject for a number of decades, has all of a sudden come to the center stage of energy research. The understanding of biological processes including the origin of diseases at the molecular level will be a chemists' affair, chemical biology will flourish. And all the endeavors in the various directions will need new and further refined analytical tools and methods, and the synthesis of molecules and materials will not lose its central importance with catalytic methods being in the focus of those efforts. Finally, theoretical chemistry will be a major topic for chemists in their aim to achieve a fundamental understanding of chemical reactions and biological processes.

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References

1. http://www.unibas.ch/index.cfm?uuid=D112116CAEC4052F1CDD74A478D3B383&o_lang_id=

